



# Jennifer Maxwell

PLANO'S FIRST FEMALE FIREFIGHTER

BY BRIT MOTT

► *Join us as we salute some of Plano's finest leading ladies.*

**M**EET PLANO'S FIRST FEMALE FIREFIGHTER. Jennifer Maxwell, a captain at Fire Station 11, has been on the front lines protecting Plano citizens from fire emergencies for 30 years.

Jennifer was born in Winter Park, Florida, and began her career in 1982 with the Orange County Fire-Rescue Department. She worked there for four years before meeting her husband and moving to Greenville, Texas.

Becoming Plano's first firewoman was no surprise. Jennifer said that the designation was part of the interview process. "The chief, at the time, told me about some negative media attention regarding an all-white, male department, and that I would be the first woman, if hired."

She continued, "When I came here, I had already been doing the job for four years. I knew I could live at the fire station, and I knew I could fight fire. So, it was good that Plano's first female firefighter had experience."

Naturally, this designation gave Jennifer confidence, so she wasn't worried about being held to a different standard. "I think the guys were more worried about me than I was about them," she joked.

Furthermore, Jennifer wasn't the only minority being hired at the time. "My group had the first black guy and two Hispanic guys."

The crew quickly bonded, which is common among firefighters because of their long work schedules. Typically, there are three captains at each station who are responsible for one shift (A shift, B shift and C shift) with anywhere between four and 12 crew members. A shift is 24 hours, from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 a.m. the next morning, every third day.

"I am one of seven kids, so that was perfect training for living in the fire station," laughed Jennifer.

In the last 30 years, Jennifer has been part of many memorable fire-rescue stories, both proud moments and, of course, stories of loss. "The tough ones really stay with you," she said. "There was this wreck involving two brothers, a 16-year-old and an 8-year-old. The 16-year-old was driving and fell asleep at the wheel. Their vehicle caught on fire. The parents were on the scene because they were driving a separate vehicle behind them, and I had to tell the parents that their 16-year-old was still trapped in the car and didn't make it. They transported the other boy to the hospital, so I encouraged them to go be with their other son, but unfortunately, he didn't make it either."

Jennifer continued, "This happened right before a shift change, so I headed home. I have three step-kids, two boys and a girl, and the boys were squabbling, and I told them what happened and urged them be nice to each other. It hit home."

Jennifer admitted, "You can quickly become hardened with this job, but the department—we're family. Recently, a captain at Station 8 was in a motorcycle accident. It's a beautiful thing to see our fire department family pull together. It makes me so proud to be a Plano firefighter." ■